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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN'S PROPOSAL TO  
ABOLISH THE NATIONAL UNIFICATION COUNCIL AND GUIDELINES

¶1. Summary: Major Chinese-language Taiwan dailies continued to focus their coverage February 23 on the aftermath of President Chen Shui-bian's announced proposal to abolish the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG). In addition, U.S. arms procurements, a BBC interview with KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou in London, the February 28 Incident of 1947, and the "1992 Consensus" were also covered heavily in the newspapers. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, juxtaposed a Ma statement in the BBC interview and Chen's remark when meeting with U.S. House Representative Rob Simmons (R-CT) in a banner headline on its front page that said: "Ma Ying-jeou: Taiwan Independence Is One of the Possible Options for [the Taiwan] People; President Chen: If It Is so, NUC Should Be Abolished." The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" also ran a banner headline on its second page that quoted Taiwan Foreign Minister James Huang as saying: "Taiwan-U.S. Communication over the Abolition of NUC and NUG; [Both Sides] Have More in Common than Differences."

¶2. The pro-unification "United Daily News," on the other hand, ran an article on its front page with the headline: "[Regarding] Bian's Proposal to Abolish the NUC and NUG, China Criticizes Upgraded Taiwan Independence, While the United States Urges Taiwan to Exercise Restraint." The pro-status quo "China Times" ran a related news story in an inside page with the headline: "Bian Insisting on Abolishing the NUC and NUG, It Is Rare That the United States Singles out Taiwan to Exercise Restraint." The "China Times," in addition, ran an exclusive story on its front page with the headline that quoted KMT Legislator Su Chi as saying "Bian Sent Secret Envoy to China Last Year."

¶3. All Chinese-language papers carried reports about U.S. House Representative Rob Simmons's speech before the Taipei American Chamber of Commerce and his meeting with President Chen Wednesday. Both the "Liberty Times" and "Taiwan Daily" devoted almost a whole inside page to a transcript of Ma Ying-jeou's interview on the BBC's "Hardtalk" television program, in which Ma talked about cross-Straits relations and U.S. arms procurements.

¶4. Almost all Chinese-language papers editorialized on President Chen's proposal to abolish the NUC and NUG and on cross-Straits relations. A "Liberty Times" editorial urged Chen to stay firm, and to resist all pressure while carrying out his mission to abolish the NUC and NUG. A "Taiwan Daily" editorial called on Washington not to overlook the fact that China is the source of chaos in that it seeks to

alter the cross-Strait status quo and sabotage peace. A "United Daily News" editorial commented that "Chen wants to use the abolition of the NUC and NUG to prove that he is the flagman of Taiwan independence, and he also wants to highlight the fact that he dares to resist Washington and provoke Beijing." Professor Yang Yung-ming of National Taiwan University opined in the pro-status quo "China Times" that "What Washington is going to do to prevent Taipei's next step to alter the status quo is testing U.S. President George W. Bush's patience and wisdom." An editorial in the limited-circulated, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" urged Chen not to push Taiwan to "the precipice." End summary.

A) "Taiwan Must Stay Firm to Walk Its Own Road"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (2/23):

"Despite heavy pressure from outside [of Taiwan] and the different voices of the pro-China groups inside Taiwan trying to pull his leg, President Chen Shui-bian evidently looks determined to abolish the NUC and NUG. . Chen's abolition of the NUC and NUG is simply a move to scrap the 'last No' [in Chen's 'Five No's' pledge], putting an end to a government body and papers that have remained dormant for the past six years. The move to do so is just an administrative procedure. How can it affect or cause deterioration of relations across the Taiwan Strait? In addition, the real reason behind the cross-Strait impasse lies in the fact that China is unwilling to renounce the use of force against Taiwan or to treat Taiwan on an equal footing. Taiwan has never gotten any positive response [from China] no matter how many olive branches it has extended. . Now, all the people of Taiwan and the world are watching how Chen is going to resist pressure from all sides and carry out his mission to abolish the NUC and NUG."

B) "China Is Changing the Status quo Across the Taiwan Strait and Sabotaging Cross-Strait Peace as Planned, and the United States Must Never Overlook [This Fact]"

The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" [circulation: 100,000] said in an editorial (2/23):

". This newspaper wants to remind the United States that China is the real source of chaos that alters the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, sabotages cross-Strait peace and causes the United States to lose its interests. .

". Here are our questions: What did the United States do for Taiwan when China planned to pass the Anti-Secession Law? Given the fact that China totally disregarded Taiwan's goodwill gestures and used strategic united-front [measures] against Taiwan . the abolition of the NUC and NUG is nothing but a move for Taiwan to passively adjust its cross-Strait policy and to preserve the right of its people to make their own choices.

With regard to U.S. interests, the United States' security layout plan in the Asia-Pacific region will be affected if Taiwan is controlled by pro-China forces. ."

C) "What Pledge Does Chen Shui-bian Place on His Gambling Table?"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (2/23):

". Unless Chen Shui-bian really wants to carry out 'de jure Taiwan independence and alter the status quo' this time, or his proposal to 'abolish the NUC and NUG and hold a referendum on Taiwan's new constitution' will turn out to be something that begins with a roar and ends with a whimper, just like the proposed 'referendum on Taiwan independence' [in 2004], which changed into a 'preventive referendum.' Perhaps Chen will really scrap the 'last No' in his pledge, but unless he has lost his reason, it is expected that he

will put on the brake right before the red line drawn with the 'Four No's' pledge. But should it really happen, Taiwan will be harmed both internally and externally, just like when it held the [first-ever] referendum in 2004. Chen, on the other hand, will gain the wounded political interests [he desires]. The move will put him on the position of a flagman of Taiwan independence. .

"Chen wants to use the abolition of the NUC and NUG to prove that he is the flagman of Taiwan independence; he also wants to highlight the fact that he dares to resist Washington and provoke Beijing. But in reality, chances for slim for him to hop out of the palm that controls the world. Instead, what he gets is deteriorated mutual trust between Washington and Taipei, more hostile cross-strait relations and a more unstable living condition for Taiwan. ."

D) "The Race for the Right to Define the Cross-Strait Status Quo"

Professor Yang Yung-ming of National Taiwan University opined in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (2/23):

". Judged from the interactions between Washington, Beijing and Taipei over the past few years, the 'Five No's' pledge carried comprehensive and symbolic significance and is almost equivalent to a 'red zone' between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.' As a result, the presence of the 'Five No's' pledge is significant in the way that it itself has major strategic interests in maintaining the status quo and peace across the Taiwan Strait. Even though the abolition of the NUC and NUG, under careful manipulation, may not necessarily cross the red zone, the consequences of such a move will definitely invite a new wave of movements from Beijing and will expand Washington's distrust toward Taipei. Everyone knows that the abolition of the NUC and NUG is just the first step, and there are more steps to get rid of unification and shift toward unification to follow up. What Washington is going to do to prevent Taipei's next step to alter the status quo is testing U.S. President George W. Bush's patience and wisdom. ."

E) "Don't Push Taiwan to the Precipice"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] said in an editorial (2/23):

". Chen seems determined to carry out a plan he proposed in his New Year statement, in which he remarked that he was going to scrap the National Unification Council and National Unification Guidelines. That announcement dropped a bombshell on the local political scene and has had a strong impact on relations between Taiwan, the United States and the Chinese mainland.

"The U.S., Taiwan's staunchest ally over the years, has expressed deep concern about Chen's plan and has reportedly warned that Taiwan would have to bear the responsibility for the possible consequences. . Taiwan's relations with the U.S. are suffering from Chen's readiness to pursue a highly hazardous course. A decrease in U.S. support would make the island dangerously vulnerable to an attack from the mainland. If President Chen continues to push for de-jure as well as de-facto independence, it will soon create a life-and-death situation for the 23 million residents of this island."

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